

## INTRODUCTION

The mission of the State Center for Health Statistics, Louisiana Office of Public Health, is to collect and distribute accurate, understandable information vital to informed decision making on matters concerning individual and community health. The goal of the *1997 Louisiana Vital Statistics Report* is to present and explain the health surveillance data collected on Louisiana's vital event certificates. We welcome your feedback on the usefulness and readability of this report.

The *1997 Louisiana Vital Statistics Report* describes health status data collected on Louisiana's vital event certificates of Live Birth, Spontaneous Fetal Death (stillbirth), Induced Termination of Pregnancy (induced abortion), Death, Marriage, and Divorce. Data collected on these certificates are used to describe trends and current status in infant and maternal health and in the causes of death most prevalent in race, sex, and age groups. This basic surveillance of vital events is essential in identifying individual and community health concerns and in targeting and evaluating health education and service efforts.

This year's report contains ten chapters that describe vital event data and two chapters that present supplemental information. The ten data chapters are "Summary of Vital Events," "Population," "Live Births," "Spontaneous Fetal Deaths," "Induced Terminations of Pregnancy," "Deaths," "Infant Mortality," "Maternal Mortality," "Marriage and Divorce," and "Healthy People 2000." Each of these chapters contains text, tables, and charts describing state-level data. Several of these chapters also contain tables specific to Louisiana's sixty-four parishes and nine Office of Public Health administrative regions.

The ten data chapters are followed by two ancillary chapters. The first is "Technical Notes," which identifies data sources, describes data processing methods and assumptions, and provides a glossary of technical terms. The second is "Certificate Facsimiles," which contains facsimiles of the vital event certificates used by Louisiana to collect the data included in this report.

New to the 1997 report is an expanded look at spontaneous fetal deaths in Louisiana, incorporating the National Center for Health Statistics' methodology for calculating gestational age, and examining prenatal care and tobacco/alcohol use among women who experience a spontaneous fetal death. Also new to this report is a description of Covenant Marriages in Louisiana.



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